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SUBJECT: KUWAIT'S AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ FINDS IMPROVED
SECURITY, BUT ONGOING FRUSTRATION OVER IRAQI INTRANSIGENCE

REF: KUWAIT 1185

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and
d

1.(C) Summary: Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq, Ali Al-Mou'min recounted for the CDA on December 11 his continuing frustration with perceived Iraqi intransigence on border and other bilateral issues, but noted that improved security in Iraq had enabled him to accomplish a visit outside Baghdad to the Shia strongholds of Karbala and Najaf. Al-Mou'min accomplished his most recent December 6-10 trip using private commercial aircraft vice Milair and plans to continue the commercial option in 2009, notwithstanding continuing security issues. While acknowledging frustration with Iraq's intransigence and bureaucratic delays, he plans to return to Baghdad in January to make renewed efforts to push forward the bilateral agenda. He plans to extend his travels to Anbar Province and Mosul in the near future and hopes that this can be accomplished with the tacit support of U.S. security forces. End Summary.

12. (C) The Charge, accompanied by Poloff, on December 11 called on Ali Al-Mou'min, Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq for a readout of Al-Mou'min's December 6-10 trip to Iraq, his third since he presented his credentials in Baghdad on October 22. Al-Mou'min told the CDA that, in contrast to his earlier visits, which were limited to Baghdad, he had included Karbala and Najaf in his most recent itinerary (accompanied by his wife), thereby combining -- as a religious Shia -- a personal pilgrimage with his ambassadorial duties. Al-Mou'min, who as the long-term head of Kuwait's Humanitarian Operations Center has traveled extensively in Iraq, commented enthusiastically about the improved security he witnessed in these two cities and praised the support he received for his travel from local Iraqi authorities. Al-Mou'min also thanked the USG for the extensive Milair and security support it provided that enabled him to accomplish his initial visits, while acknowledging that the existing U.S.-GOK agreement permitting such assistance terminates on December 31 and will not be renewed. Al-Mou'min noted that he accomplished this most recent visit using the private commercial firm Skylink and is exploring a range of transportation options for his 2009 travel. Al-Mou'min also noted that he is interested in visiting Anbar Province and Mosul in the near future and hopes that U.S. forces will be in the area and able to provide security if needed. He admitted that he continues to distrust the Iraqi security forces and remains concerned about his ability to travel in safety between Baghdad airport and the International Zone as well as outside Baghdad. Al-Mou'min also commented that his present residential and administrative headquarters in the Hotel Rasheed are "depressing" and hoped that he could be allowed access to some U.S. Green Zone facilities.

13. (C) Commenting on his accomplishments thus far as Ambassador, Al-Mou'min admitted to continuing frustration

with perceived Iraqi non-responsiveness to Kuwaiti efforts to advance the bilateral relationship. He noted, in this context, that in his capacity as head of the Humanitarian Operations Center he had advanced some three years ago several million dollars in Kuwaiti funds to implement humanitarian projects focused on women and orphans in Najaf and Samawah, including a project to build a housing complex for the displaced, but that -- thanks to Iraqi bureaucratic red tape -- the housing project was only now nearing completion. Al-Mou'min also commented on the Iraqi intransigence over the continuing presence of a number of Iraqi farmers located on or in immediate proximity to Kuwaiti soil. Kuwait has provided funds through the UN Compensation Commission adequate to build new homes for the farmers away from the border, but Iraq continues to drag its feet on identifying a location for the new site.

14. (C) Echoing a December 01 conversation the CDA had with the Iraqi Charge in Kuwait (Reftel), Al-Mou'min confirmed that the Kuwaiti MFA recently presented the Iraqis with a diplomatic note inviting the GOI to send representatives to discuss dredging and wreck-removal in the Khor Abdullah. To date, the Iraqis have not responded to the invitation. Al-Mou'min said he could not discern whether this was due to a lack of Iraqi interest, or mere bureaucratic delay, but admitted that the experience of dealing with the Iraqis had blunted some of his initial optimism. Al-Mou'min expressed frustration with what he perceived as an Iraqi tendency to allow Kuwait and other countries to propose the resources and solutions to resolve Iraqi problems rather than taking proactive measures themselves. Comparing the Iraq/Kuwait situation to Lebanon he said, "look at the difference in

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Lebanon (under Hezbollah) after six months compared with our situation. After five years, nothing has been done." Notwithstanding his frustration, Al-Mou'min said he was determined to push the Iraqis to take the steps that would benefit the bilateral relationship, commenting that "we must poke them -- it's for their benefit, but they don't notice."

15. (C) Commenting on other observations from his latest visit, Al-Mou'min noted the following:

-- Praised Iraqi Oil Minister Shahrastani, who told him that he had received pressure from Russian PM Putin for an oil deal. Shahrastani allegedly told the Russians they must enter into competition to be considered, but Putin reportedly responded that this (i.e. without competition) is the way that the Russians made deals under the Saddam Hussein regime. Shahrastani apparently held fast to his "no competition, no deal" position.

-- He had delivered a message from Amir Al Sabah to President Talibani encouraging expanded commercial exchanges.

-- Recounted the history of Kuwait's offer to (originally conveyed to Jaaferi and Allawi) of more than USD 500 million in reconstruction aid, stressing that hardly any has been sent because the GOI has not proposed projects or sectors.

16. (C) Turning to his plans for 2009, Al-Mou'min told the CDA he plans to return to Iraq in January for a longer stay, with the intention of pressing the Iraqis for real solutions on the several ongoing points of contention between the two sides.

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